

# A Process of Discovery

DAVID HINTON TURNED HIS CHEMICAL ENGINEERING STUDIES INTO A 22-YEAR INVESTMENT CAREER



David Hinton ('95) acknowledges that his 22-year career in the investment field with Boston Partners represents an odd turn for a chemical engineering major.

Dig deeper into Hinton's backstory, however, and his move from studying thermodynamics, fluid mechanics, and energy transfer to making buy, sell, or hold recommendations isn't as far-fetched as it might seem initially.

After all, Hinton, a Cleveland native drawn to Northwestern by its strong academics, Big Ten status, and Midwestern location, had planned on majoring in economics until a high school teacher, recognizing his aptitude in math and science, encouraged him to explore engineering.

Once at Northwestern, Hinton enjoyed discovering in his engineering courses how to research, create, and refine processes. Ultimately though, he didn't see himself pursuing chemical engineering's traditional paths in process- and plant-support roles. Instead, he envisioned himself in the business world, perhaps working his way through investment banking and private equity before someday running companies.

Lively, inspired conversations with his adviser, chemical engineering professor Julio M. Ottino, helped Hinton realize his undergraduate studies and professional ambitions were closer to each other than he imagined. As Ottino spoke about marrying left-brain analytical skills with right-brain creativity—a prelude to the whole-brain engineering mindset Ottino would champion as dean of Northwestern Engineering from 2005 to 2023—Hinton felt empowered and confident.

"Things aren't always in a straight line," he says. "I began to see that the problem-solving and analytical skills I was gaining as a chemical engineering student would be invaluable in any profession I'd choose."

And while Hinton's professional career began in more traditional engineering roles—first in environmental engineering, designing wastewater treatment plants and waste remediation systems, followed by a stint at LTV Steel Co.—it wasn't long before he pursued his business ambitions. He earned an MBA from the Tuck School of Business at Dartmouth College and joined Boston Partners in 2002 as an equity analyst, eventually covering the media, utilities, and insurance industries before joining the firm's small cap strategy team in 2007.

Today, Hinton is into his third decade as an equity analyst at Boston Partners, where the meritocracy of investing provides energizing challenges. Focused on creating informative analyses of small-cap stocks, Hinton's work includes conducting fundamental research on companies, investigating financial statements, interviewing industry experts, and summoning his chemical engineering background to deconstruct business operations.

"I believe there are some insights that I have over the average investor because I've been in the plant and watched manufacturing up close," he says.

Appreciative of his Northwestern experience, Hinton currently serves as chair of the Murphy Society, the McCormick School of Engineering alumni group that helps shape the school's education and research priorities by advising the dean on special project funding decisions.

"I'm very loyal to Northwestern and value the opportunity to give my time to help move the school forward," Hinton says. "It's exciting to interact with alumni and leadership and know Northwestern remains as ambitious as ever."

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